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B Period

Ch. 8 Test Essay

“Sir, I have the honor to transmit to Your Excellency the information of your unanimous election to the office of the president of the United States of America.” These were the words of Senator John Langdon written to General George Washington. On April 30th, 1789, Washington took the oath of office and became the first president of the United States under the federal Constitution. Since this happened Washington could not go through with a quiet retirement because he was elected the highest office position there was. Back then some people thought that the president would try to become king but they trusted Washington since he brought them victory in the revolution. As he was president he did many great things that helped build the United States to what it is today like shaping the presidency, forming the bill of rights, dealing with financial and economic problems, and solving geographic problems over the West and Europe.

First of all, since Washington was the first president under the Constitution he had to make many hard and challenging decisions to help shape the presidency. He mainly did this by setting precedents, like what the people had to call him, and he asked to be called Mr. President. He also had to decide on the structure of the government. For example the Constitution gave the Congress the power to form Executive departments but it did not say whether they should report to the President of the Congress. Congress created three executive departments, however, they were evenly divided by votes as to whether the president could replace an official that he appointed and the senate conformed. This was a challenge to the president’s area of authority. Vice president Adams voted to allow the president the authority to fire officials without the senate’s approval and this strengthened the president’s position and created greater separation between the Legislative and Executive branches. Another challenge for the president was to decide how to set up the nation’s courts because there were disagreements about whether to have a national system or a state system. Finally the administration decided to set up the Supreme Court and that stands until today.

In addition to shaping the presidency, George Washington’s administration faced a great challenge because Americans feared a strong central government. They had fought a revolution to throw off one government and they wanted guarantees of personal liberties. The Vice President, James Madison, introduced a set of amendments during the first session of congress. To satisfy the promises made during the fight for the ratification of the Constitution the congress passed 12 amendments to the Constitution to protect the rights of individual liberty. Ten of these Amendments were ratified. George Washington administration accomplished this settlement between the states, individuals, and the central government by passing the Bill of Rights. This ensured that the central government could proceed smoothly.

Also, there were serious financial and economic problems that the administration had to deal with. Washington asked his dynamic secretary of the treasury to address these problems. One of them was that the new nation faced a large national debt and the president’s secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton, proposed that the new government pay off the millions of dollars in debts owed by the confederation government to other countries and to individual American citizens. Congress agreed to pay other countries but not the American citizens. To win support from the people Hamilton agreed to move the capitol to the South. Another financial problem was the tax on whiskey. The government needed this tax but the farmers could not pay it because they exchanged goods most of the time and rarely had and used cash. The farmers started an armed protest called the Whiskey Rebellion. To stop the rebellion Washington sent out the army and they stopped it as soon as they crossed the Appalachian Mountains. Also, Hamilton made proposals to help build a strong national economy, like setting up a national bank. Madison and Jefferson opposed the idea of the national bank because they believed it would mainly benefit the wealthy, however the president sided with Hamilton and signed the bill creating the bank. Two other ideas that were proposed by Hamilton but opposed by Jefferson and Madison were protective tariffs and national taxes. This disagreement started to create the political parties.

Besides the financial problems the new government faced many geographic problems. One problem was that some Native Americans denied that the United States had authority over them and their land between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, so occasionally they turned to Britain and Spain for help. George Washington wanted to sign treaties with the North American tribes but the American settlers ignored him and moved onto the Native’s land, and then fighting broke out. His first attempt to restore order failed when General Arthur St. Clair’s forces were badly beaten by Little Turtle, the Chief of the Miami people. Then in 1974 Washington’s army, lead by Anthony Wayne, finally defeated Shawnee Chief Blue Jacket. The Natives’ hopes of keeping their land were crushed and they agreed to the Treaty of Greenville which surrendered to the Americans most of the land in present-day Ohio. There were also problems in Europe as Britain and France went to war. Jefferson was pro-French while Hamilton and Adams wanted to support the British. Washington wanted to maintain neutrality but as time went on it became harder and harder to do so. He took action to discourage American involvement in the war by issuing a Proclamation of Neutrality. It prohibited American citizens from fighting in the war and also closed American ports to British and French warships, so they would not come to recruit Americans to help them in the war. He also sent John Jay to talk to the British and finally they signed a treaty with the British, Jay’s Treaty, where the British agreed to withdraw from American soil and pay damages, however it did not deal with impressments and the British interference with American trade. Although Washington found some faults in it, he knew it would form peace between them so he sent it to the Senate where it was narrowly approved after a fierce debate. Since Washington solved these big geographical problems, it helped him become a great legend.

In conclusion, Washington faced many difficulties during his administration, but he resolved them successfully. Even though he had a good chance at being elected a third term he decided to instead just retire and set a precedent that future presidents would follow, even till today. Washington looked forward to retirement because he had health problems and also was disturbed by the divisions that had developed in American politics. He felt that the growth of political parties was a danger to the nation. In his farewell speech he warned about evils of political parties, and he also urged his fellow citizens to “observe good faith and justice toward all nations…Tis our policy to steer clear of permanent alliances.” Washington’s parting words have influenced the country for more than 100 years and they are still read aloud in the Senate each year on his birthday.